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Book Review:

Transforming teacher education: Reflections from the field

D. Carroll, H. Featherstone, J. Featherstone, S. Feiman-Nemser and D. Roosevelt (Eds), 2007

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

266 pp.

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Twenty years ago in the US, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards released its policy statement, *What teachers should know and be able to do* (NBPTS, 1987). With the signing of *No Child Left Behind* (US Congress, 2002), the Federal Government mandated that a “highly qualified teacher” staff every classroom in schools across the US. While many educational scholars and organizations have used these policies to improve the field of teacher education, others have hijacked their language in efforts to privatize education, mandate scripted curricula, and push rigid and de-professionalizing accountability systems through state legislatures.

Because of these developments within the American educational policy arena, teachers are well aware of *what* they should know and be able to do. In addition, there is ample information about *why* educators find themselves in this current state of affairs. Unfortunately, little educational research or literature addresses the issue of *how* this can be achieved in teacher education programs across the US. The book *Transforming teacher education: Reflections from the field* begins to fill this void.

A comprehensive case study of Michigan State University's attempt to re-imagine its teacher education program throughout the 1990s, *Transforming teacher education* is a guidebook for other programs taking on the challenge of examining the ways in which they prepare teachers for professional practice. While acknowledging that any book could never create a blueprint for other programs, the editors and chapter authors address the successes they experienced, the roadblocks they encountered, and the issue of scaling-up (at their own university and across teacher education programs).

Beginning with a historical review of the genesis of the teacher education program, the editors create a vision of what is possible in democratic, progressive programs across the country. While these terms are often co-opted to mean something much different from their intended use, great care is taken to define what “progressive” education entails and how “democratic” ideals were explored and implemented. Through the description of the program's development, the editors explore ways in which faculty and staff at the university worked with school-based professionals and students enrolled in the program to create a community of learners that genuinely cared about the challenges of creating highly qualified educators who truly practiced those things that every teacher should know and be able to do. In the words of the editors:

Looking back, it seems clear we were committing ourselves to ... relating the field to the university, research to practice, reflection to doing—all the polarities that bedevil and

challenge thoughtful teacher education programs everywhere. ... [This was done] by establishing a new ecology of relationships between the university and the field. (pp. 16–17)

Throughout the book, this focus on relationships is evident. Chapter 1 describes the development of the program highlighting the creation of team structures such as coordination across courses, the development of student support services, and communication between the schools and the university. In chapter 2, David Carroll and Susan Donnelly describe Ms. Donnelly's role as the student coordinator. Much more than an administrator responsible for placing students in the schools, the student coordinator position was created to ensure that a point person was in place for issues ranging from those as mundane as answering questions about the program to difficult conversations such as counseling a student out of the teaching profession or dealing with mental health issues.

The theme of relationship building continues in chapter 6 as Dirck Roosevelt describes the process of child study: “a prospective teacher's semester-long guided inquiry into the strengths, educational needs, and worldview of an individual child” (p. 115). This intensive project forced pre-service teachers to reject the tendency to reduce students to test scores by focusing the prospective teachers' attention on creating evidence-based claims about the knowledge and skills possessed by an individual child. By insisting that future teachers examine the educational strengths and needs of their students, the program legitimated the building of relationships it so strongly espoused.

A second prevalent theme throughout the book is the constant focus on inquiry within the program. In chapter 3, Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Cindy Hartzler-Miller discuss the evolution of the Teacher Preparation Program Standards. The authors describe the continual revision that took place over the years as new issues emerged. This attention to the ever-present need to meet the changing demands of teaching and education bucks the trend to identify “best practices” which insinuate that perfection has been achieved.

In a self-study of teaching practices in her math methods course, Helen Featherstone (chapter 4) takes an inquiry stance in an attempt to create the type of classroom atmosphere she hoped her pre-service teachers would eventually foster in their own classrooms. Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Kathrene Beasley (chapter 7) examine the roles of cooperating/mentor teachers through a collaborative action research project, and Patricia J. Norman (chapter 8) and David Carroll (chapter 9) rethink the responsibilities of university supervisors/liaisons as they interact with professionals within the schools. Each of these chapters highlights different aspects of the teacher education program while focusing attention on the importance of reflective practice and its affects on program development.

Finally, Dirck Roosevelt, Julie Hanson-Eglite, and Greta McHaney-Trice attempt to delineate the moral and ethical considerations of teaching (chapter 5). As with the other chapters, the authors continually demonstrate the reflective practices that pervaded the teacher education program at Michigan State University during the 1990s. Insisting that all members of the community continually examine their understandings of their roles as educators, the program effectively modeled the characteristics it hoped to instill in its graduates. In their conclusion, the editors note:

At its best, a culture of inquiry encourages members of a community to try to reframe apparently intractable problems or to transform obstacles into potentially compelling questions—to turn dilemmas into sites for inquiry and group learning. (p. 230)

By constructing a caring educational community that continually employed an inquiry stance, the teacher education faculty at Michigan State University led the charge to alter the types of experiences in which prospective teachers are immersed. *Transforming teacher education* tells the story of the program, poses a challenge to all faculties of education, and gives the reader an authentic example of one teacher education program that dared to instigate change. In an era when value-added assessments and scientifically-based outcomes trump the educational opportunities and experiences of individual students, it's comforting to know that there are those who truly understand what highly qualified teachers should know and be able to do.

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References

1. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. 1987. *What teachers should know and be able to do*, Arlington, VA: Author.
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